

Exchange With Reporters Prior to Discussions With President Boris Yeltsin of Russia in Halifax

June 17, 1995

Q. Mr. President, let me ask you a question. Are you now changing your mind as to the people against whom Mr. Yeltsin is waging a war when you learn what's going on in Budennovsk? That's Russian Television News question.

President Yeltsin. In the first place, I would like to say that my friend, Bill, has never wavered in his opinion. He has always supported and is supporting Russia and President Yeltsin.

I would like to say that the storming of the hospital is continuing, that we have liberated 200 hostages, and the operation is going on. I am in contact, in constant contact with our commanders who command our special forces who stormed the hospital, and I am in full control of the situation.

Taking this example, you should judge for yourselves that Chechnya today is the center of world terrorism, of bribery and corruption and mafia. We couldn't act otherwise. We had to destroy those terrorists and bandits.

Well, not all in the world understood this situation correctly and perhaps not all of the mass media understood correctly. But I am very glad that my friend, Bill, understood me correctly and, nonetheless, always defended his position no matter what happened.

I just have to say that our state Dumas, as a matter of fact, today has made the decision to have the President go back, come back home and make a visit to Budennovsk. I think, therefore, that this is a bad mistake, a bad move on their part because now I, myself, become a hostage to these very same bandits by having to go back there.

And moreover, I have to say that after my discussion yesterday—and I once again reiterated that today to our partners in the G-7 and told them what kind of people we're dealing with, what kind of horrible criminals with black bands on their foreheads—they now much better understand that this is really the only way that we can deal with these criminal elements. They really now understand much more.

Dear journalists, Bill and I accumulated a whole host of very important issues—global issues, not some internal Russian disputes and issues or internal American problems. These are really serious, overwhelming global issues. And therefore, I say, we've got to go.

Thank you, and goodbye.

Q. President Clinton, do you agree with what he said about your position?

President Clinton. Well, let me tell you what my position is. First of all, it is true that the United States has always said that Chechnya was a part of Russia and was ultimately a problem that had to be resolved by the people of your nation, consistent with your constitutional laws.

It is also true that we believe that terrorism everywhere is wrong, that terrorism in the Middle East is wrong, that people blowing up our Federal building in Oklahoma City is wrong, and people taking over a hospital in your country and killing innocent civilians is wrong, and has to be resisted strong.

But I also subscribe to the position taken by the G-7 that sooner or later—better sooner than later—the cycle of violence has to be broken. And ultimately, in any democracy, there has to be a political solution to people's differences. And so that is what we have urged.

President Yeltsin and I have had several conversations about this. When I was in Moscow I said that I understood it was a terribly difficult situation for Russia but that the United States believed that, ultimately, in any democracy, all decisions were finally resolved in a political manner in a way that would permit the cycle of violence to be broken.

So that is our position. It is still our position. And we hope that it will become more possible now. But nothing—nothing—can justify this outrageous act at your hospital and innocent people being killed. It's just wrong.

I want to mention one other issue because it won't be in the headlines, but it's terribly important. When President Yeltsin and I were together in Moscow for the anniversary of the end of World War II, we talked about the problem of nuclear security. And I told him then I thought it was very important that we work closely together on the problem of

nuclear security, not just in Russia but in other countries where this is an issue, and on the problem of nuclear smuggling, because with so many terrorist groups around the world, we don't want small-scale nuclear weapons being added to their already impressive arsenals.

So when he came to this meeting, President Yeltsin suggested that we have a summit next year in Moscow dealing with these issues and involving many, many countries that have this problem. And I think we all agree. We think it's a very constructive suggestion. And we believe that, together, by next year we can make some real progress in making the world more secure for this problem in reducing the likelihood of nuclear smuggling and, ultimately, the likelihood of these small-scale weapons being used to further the cause of terrorism.

So that is one of the positive things that came out of this summit, from my point of view, along with the agreement we all made to work together more closely in fighting terrorism and the agreement we made to try to prevent further Mexican crisis and continued reform of the international financial institutions.

So from my point of view, this has been a very successful meeting. I know that the problem in Chechnya is occupying everyone's attention. The gripping scene at the hospital must have a hold on the imagination of the Russian people, very much like the explosion in Oklahoma City had on our people. And we join the Russian people in condemning terrorism in the strongest possible terms.

But we hope that in the end all the people of Russia, including the people in Chechnya, can be reconciled so that your democracy can flourish everywhere and the cycle of violence can be broken. And that is our prayer, and that is our policy.

Thank you very much.

NOTE: The exchange began at 2:49 p.m. in the Cavalier Room at the Citadel Hotel. President Yeltsin spoke in Russian, and his remarks were translated by an interpreter. A tape was not available for verification of the content of this exchange.

Teleconference Remarks With the U.S. Conference of Mayors

June 20, 1995

The President. Thank you. Thank you very much, Mayor Rice. And I want to begin by congratulating Mayor Ashe on a great year as president. I have enjoyed working with you very much. And I look forward to working with you, Norm, in the year ahead. I also want to say hello to some of my old friends in Miami. I see Mayor Daley and Mayor Clark are there. I understand that Secretary Brown and Secretary Cisneros are also both with you today.

Let me say before I go forward that I noticed in one of the previous sessions you had that it was suggested that we don't need the Department of Housing and Urban Development anymore. Let me say that I think Henry Cisneros and his whole team have done a magnificent job, and I don't think we want to send Andrew Cuomo to the beach just yet. I hope you agree.

I also want to thank all of you for giving me this chance to speak with you today. I'm very proud that our administration has worked in an unprecedented partnership with our cities, our communities, and especially our mayors. You make real budgets. You deal with real problems. You know the real concerns of our people as we try to restore the American dream. I'm looking forward to our continued cooperation. And I want to keep focused on the real problems our country faces.

You have heard in the previous speakers who have appeared before you strands of the great debates now going on in Washington and throughout our country. There are those who say that our primary problems are personal and cultural, not economic and political. There are those who say that the biggest problems we face are due to the fact that the Federal Government has too much authority and more ought to be given to the State and local level.

Well, I have to say to you that I'm glad to have these debates. I was making these arguments long before this Presidential election season, indeed, long before I became a candidate for President in 1992, when I was a Governor, working on the values prob-